

## TESTIMONY OF NICKOLAI BUTKEVICH

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Before the

CSCE COMMISSION HEARING “HUMAN RIGHTS IN PUTIN’S RUSSIA”

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As UCSJ’s director of research and advocacy, and on behalf of UCSJ, its president, Yosef I. Abramowitz and its National Director, Micah H. Naftalin, I am very pleased to be here this afternoon. I will summarize my prepared statement which I hope will appear in full in the record of this hearing.

Over many years, UCSJ has been both pleased and honored to brief the Helsinki Commission on the plight of Refuseniks, and in more recent years on the antisemitic and racist abuse of Jews, Muslims, and other ethnic and religious minorities in the Russian Federation and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Often, we have done so in concert with our principal partner, the Moscow Helsinki Group.

Under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, and that of your predecessors and colleagues as well as its expert and devoted professional staff, the Helsinki Commission stands as the preeminent venue in the United States government for thoughtful and continuous attention to human rights. It is of special importance in the case of the Russian Federation, a country with a mixed record of progress toward democracy, made more problematic because most other political and diplomatic institutions, as well as the media, seem to have relegated it to the back burner of policy discussion, despite its enormous strategic importance for the United States. We think this neglect is extremely dangerous and hope that your hearing today will help to redress the balance of attention.

### SUMMARY

The consensus among Russian human rights activists and Russia’s mainstream media is that xenophobia is a growing problem, made worse by the lack of consistent and effective government action against hate groups. My testimony will focus on recent hate crimes and how the justice system has responded to them. I will also describe a European Commission project to combat xenophobia; a project in which UCSJ, the Moscow Helsinki Group and UCSJ’s independent affiliate the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights are the main participants. Finally, I will share my thoughts on the rise of a new extremist nationalist party—the Motherland bloc—and the disturbing success of the extremist nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (headed by Vladimir Zhirinovsky) in the December 2003 parliamentary elections.

## RECENT INCIDENTS

On April 20, neo-Nazis around the world celebrated the 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Adolf Hitler's birth. Nowhere was the date marked with more violence than in Russia, a country that lost tens of millions of its citizens in the struggle against Nazism six decades ago. Since the late 1990s, Russia's home-grown fascists have spent the days surrounding April 20 stepping up the rate of their attacks on dark-skinned ethnic minorities, foreign students (predominantly from developing countries), and Jews. This disgusting annual spectacle is presumably deeply embarrassing to President Putin, who has on many occasions publicly condemned racism and antisemitism in no uncertain terms. Yet for some reason, the president and his top aides have so far stayed silent in the face of a wave of hate crimes that took place in April 2004.

On April 16, around 60 skinheads armed with baseball bats stormed a dormitory housing Chinese and Korean students in Vladivostok, all the while screaming racist slogans and beating anybody they could find. Two security guards at a nearby dorm bravely intervened and detained nine of the attackers, though not before they injured several students, two of whom ended up in the hospital. According to media reports, police took more than two hours to arrive at the scene after being called by the guards. A police dispatcher allegedly advised the guards to deal with the problem themselves, which they did, holding the neo-Nazis at gun point, while at the same time warding off a growing mob of enraged foreign students. When the police finally arrived to take the skinheads into custody, they reportedly let them go.

On April 18, a bomb exploded near a Moscow dormitory which predominantly houses Vietnamese workers and students, injuring 19 and shattering over 200 windows. A timing mechanism was found nearby, voiding earlier police theories that the explosion was caused by a gas leak. The timing of the bombing naturally raised suspicions that it was the work of Moscow's skinheads, but police sources played down that theory, arguing that it may have been the work of gangsters targeting Vietnamese market traders. This theory cannot be discounted, since not only skinheads but also gangsters, and in some instances, police, regularly target non-Russian market traders in Moscow and many other cities.

On April 22, eight extremist youths attacked the Ulyanovsk Jewish Center. Screaming antisemitic threats, the youths burst into the building, smashing windows and tearing down Jewish symbols. The two young Jews inside the building hid, waiting for the police, who only bothered to come 40 minutes after they were called, by which time the extremists had left the scene, thankfully without injuring anybody. To the credit of the local police, patrols were started around the community center on April 20, and continued for two days afterwards. The extremists apparently waited until the police left on the afternoon of the 22<sup>nd</sup>; half an hour later, they struck.

A member of the extremist National Bolshevik Party was later arrested in connection with the attack. This good news was somewhat tempered by an unfortunate statement made by the senior inspector of the Ulyanovsk region's Department of Internal Affairs—

Colonel Sergey Suchkov—who was cited in the Volga regional edition of the national newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* as saying that skinhead groups don't exist in the city. However, over the past two years, armed skinheads have attacked the Ulyanovsk Jewish center twice, resulting in several injuries as well as extensive property damage. Several Jewish youth leaders have also been assaulted.

On April 29, Aleksey Kozlov, a regional monitor for a European Commission sponsored project (of which UCSJ, the Moscow Helsinki Group, and the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights are grantees) to monitor antisemitism and racism in Russia, was attacked by skinheads. Mr. Kozlov, a well known anti-fascist youth activist in Voronezh, was reportedly assaulted by two skinheads outside the headquarters of the local NGO he heads—the Inter-Regional Human Rights Movement.

Throwing stones, the neo-Nazis yelled “Jews and Negroes out!” and “Beat the chief anti-fascist!” right before punching Mr. Kozlov in the face. Police quickly detained the attackers, whom they charged with “hooliganism.” Mr. Kozlov told me earlier this week that he worries that the skinheads may get off with nothing more than a fine.

Voronezh has an especially grave skinhead problem—earlier this year, neo-Nazis killed an African student there, and in the 1990s, the region was a stronghold of the now largely defunct neo-Nazi group Russian National Unity.

Other incidents in April 2004 include the desecration of three Jewish cemeteries (in Pyatigorsk, Kaluga and Karelia), an apparent, unsuccessful attempt to burn down a Nizhny Novgorod synagogue, shattered windows in a Nizhny Novgorod mosque, and the vandalism of a Jewish center in Taganrog. Suspects have been arrested in connection with the first two incidents at the time of writing.

## **HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES DEAL WITH HATE CRIMES**

While similar violent acts have become a regular feature of Russian life, it should be noted that there have been some improvements in the way Russian police deal with hate crimes. Starting in 2002, the number of arrests of skinheads started to increase in Moscow, and this year has seen a serious crackdown on neo-Nazis in Saint Petersburg. Unfortunately, in many other cities, the old pattern of official indifference to hate crimes continues.

In addition, serious problems remain at the level of the prosecutors and judges. The Russian justice system's approach to the skinhead problem is still plagued by an uneven application of justice and a tendency to punish hate crimes lightly.

Part of the problem is that Russian legislation has no definition of a hate crime. The usual Russian law enforcement practice is to classify such crimes as ordinary “hooliganism” or murders. In the rare incidents in which ethnic or religious hatred is officially admitted as a motive, Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code is usually tacked onto a hooliganism or murder charge. Article 282 prohibits “actions directed

toward the instigation of nationalist, racial or religious animosity, humiliation of national pride or, similarly, propaganda of exclusiveness, superiority or inferiority of citizens on the principle of their affiliation to religion, nationality or race.” Clearly, Article 282 was primarily designed to combat hate speech, but it is being used *de facto* by prosecutors as the equivalent of a hate crimes statute. This legal inconsistency, combined in some cases with clear antisemitic or racist bias on the part of prosecutors and/or judges, leads to many Article 282 cases falling apart, either within the investigative stage or during trial (there is an additional problem that many prosecutors feel that intent has to be proven in order to convict under Article 282; however, the word “intent” does not appear anywhere in the statute, as it did in an earlier version of the law before the mid-1990’s reforms of the Criminal Code).

The sad irony is that there are two other provisions of the Criminal Code that appear to be useful tools for prosecuting what we in the US would call hate crimes, yet their use is extremely rare. Article 105, which covers murder, contains a section (Section 2, Paragraph L) which prohibits murder “motivated by national, racial or religious hatred or animosity.” Article 111, which covers aggravated assault, contains a section (Section 2, Paragraph E) with the exact same language. I am only aware of three cases in which these articles have been applied in the decade since the Criminal Code was reformed—in two of those cases, those specific charges were dropped; one Article 105 case in Moscow recently ended in a guilty verdict (the murder by skinheads of an Armenian youth in 2002). Not being a lawyer, I cannot say for sure why these two provisions of the Criminal Code, which seem to be perfectly suitable for combating hate crimes, are essentially moribund, but this fact certainly doesn’t speak well of the Russian government’s declared efforts to combat extremism.

If a hate crimes case even gets to the trial stage, other problems often arise. For example, two recent, widely publicized trials of skinheads ended in farcical verdicts. In March 2004, the city court of Saint Petersburg sentenced three skinheads for their role in the September 2002 murder of a 53 year old Azeri watermelon vendor named Mamed Mamedov, the father of eight children. According to Russian media reports, between 20-40 skinheads beat and stabbed Mr. Mamedov to death, all the while videotaping the killing. The tape was later used in evidence against the skinheads, nevertheless, only three of them were ultimately put on trial.

One of the suspects—Aleksey Lykin—was convicted of violating Article 282, but then immediately set free (violations of Article 282 envision either a fine or a 3-5 year prison sentence). Vyacheslav Prokofev—the youth accused of delivering the fatal blow to Mr. Mamedov—got seven years, lower than the prescribed amount of time for murder (8-12 years). The judge justified this decision by citing Mr. Prokofev’s “sincere repentance.” Maksim Firsov, found guilty of stabbing Mr. Mamedov in the chest, though not actually killing him, was sentenced to four years.

These lenient sentences are especially disturbing given the current climate in Saint Petersburg, where following the murder earlier this year of a nine-year-old Tajik girl, local police have cracked down hard on skinheads, solving many previously neglected

cases, including the September 2003 murder of a six-year-old Tajik girl by skinheads. This appears to be yet another case of improved local police work being undermined by a judge who refuses to take a hate crimes murder seriously.

A month earlier in Moscow, a jury at the Moscow City Court acquitted the chief suspect in a mass attack by skinheads on vendors at the Yasenevo outdoor market in Moscow on Adolf Hitler's birthday in April 2001. Andrey Semiletnikov, deputy editor of the antisemitic and racist magazine *Russky Khozyain* (Russian Master), was acquitted of organizing the attack and inciting minors to commit a crime. Three other defendants described as about 20 years old—Valery Rusakov, Yevgeny Serzhantov, and Andrey Pochukaev—were found guilty of participating in the attack on market traders, while a fifth defendant, *Russky Khozyain* reporter Yelena Lepilina, was acquitted, based on her contention that she was present in the market only to cover the event.

During the attack, about 150 skinheads shouted ethnic slurs and beat up market traders of non-Slavic appearance. Police detained 53 teenagers and at least 10 people received medical treatment, news reports said at the time. Witnesses claimed that Mr. Semiletnikov had given youths assembled near his magazine's office a Nazi salute before addressing them. The crowd then rampaged through the market, some armed with metal rods, kicking and punching vendors and throwing stones.

The jury handed down its verdicts after three hours of deliberation. According to a February 19, 2004 *Izvestiya* article, the jurors struck down several charges that would have led to more severe sentences—including assault charges and the prosecutors' assertions that Semiletnikov incited the attack—and recommended mild sentences. A trial by jury is still relatively rare in the Russian judicial system, but they are increasingly common in Moscow in cases involving especially serious charges. On February 27, the Moscow City Court confirmed the not guilty verdict for two skinheads, including Mr. Semiletnikov. Of the remaining three skinheads, two were given suspended sentences, while Valery Rusakov—a participant in a later deadly skinhead rampage at Moscow's Tsaritsyno market—got just six months.

Earlier news accounts indicated that many witnesses were too frightened to testify. On February 4, 2004 the newspaper *Gazeta* reported that when the trial re-started after a recess on January 26, "not one of the almost 40 witnesses appeared" and even a court order demanding their appearance resulted in the appearance of only a handful of witnesses. One market security guard who had earlier identified one of the defendants claimed in court not to remember him, and several other witnesses claimed to be suffering from other, similar forms of memory loss.

The involvement of a jury in this case raises an important question—were the jurors sympathetic to the skinheads' racist attitudes towards people from the Caucasus or were they reacting fairly to a typically bad presentation by prosecutors, who are still used to operating in a system under which they only had to persuade a judge? Either way, considering how many skinheads participated in the attack (150), the fact that only five were ever brought to trial speaks for itself.

## THE NGO SECTOR'S RESPONSE TO HATE CRIMES

The NGO community is mobilizing to counter xenophobia, which given the multi-ethnic nature of the country, has clear implications for future political and economic stability if it is allowed to spin out of control. Russia's neighbors are deeply concerned as well—last year, my organization, our affiliate in Moscow (the Moscow Bureau on Human Rights), and the Moscow Helsinki Group received a 1.4 million Euro grant from the European Commission aimed at combating racism and antisemitism in Russia. At the end of March 2004, the project, entitled “Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination Against Ethnic Minorities and Indigenous People in the Russian Federation,” was launched in Moscow. Under the three-year project, we will work with several of Russia's leading NGOs and academics, as well as numerous government structures, in a comprehensive monitoring and educational effort to combat xenophobia. Monitors from 73 regions are involved in the project, a legal clinic and a hot line have been set up for victims of hate crimes, and conferences on xenophobia will be held each year of the project in all seven of Russia's federal districts.

The kick-off conference of the EC-sponsored project was held in Moscow on March 28-30, 2004. It began with a keynote address from the US Ambassador to Russia, Alexander Vershbow. Ambassador Vershbow eloquently captured the essence of our task when he said that:

Racially motivated attacks have increased significantly over the past two years, while those who commit these attacks are rarely arrested. Those who do get arrested are all too often charged with the lesser crime of “hooliganism,” rather than a hate-related crime.

Hooliganism does not adequately capture the message of hate put forth by these criminals. Dismissing them as simply “youthful hooligans” sends a chilling signal to the racists and xenophobes. It tells them that their views and actions are but a minor offense against the social order, when in fact they undermine the very fabric of Russian society. It also demeans the victim and breeds a cynicism in society that only encourages further racist acts, keeping alive the cycle of violence and hatred.<sup>1</sup>

The project's main goal is to publicize hate crimes and work with federal and regional governments to encourage them to make serious efforts to respond to hate crimes. As I described above, prosecutors and police sometimes collude to deny that a crime was motivated by ethnic or religious hatred. It is our hope that such publicity will discourage such cover ups and dissuade judges from giving neo-Nazi thugs lighter sentences than ordinary criminals.

A good example of how the NGO sector can use the media to bring about a positive impact on Russian law enforcement practices is a recent case in Voronezh. On February 21, 2004 skinheads stabbed an African student there to death. The murder received prominent coverage in the Russian media, partially due to constant reports from local and

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of his speech can be found on the embassy's web site ([http://www.usembassy.ru/bilateral/statement.php?record\\_id=85](http://www.usembassy.ru/bilateral/statement.php?record_id=85)).

national NGOs that show Voronezh as a city with a particularly vicious skinhead movement and a particularly indifferent police force. (Indeed, the heads of the regional FSB and MVD both made separate statements in 2002 and 2003 denying that skinheads even exist in Voronezh, despite dozens of reported neo-Nazi attacks.)

Even after three skinheads were arrested in connection with the murder, local law enforcement agencies denied that it was a racist crime; they even allegedly spread rumors that the African student was killed because he used the services of a prostitute and refused to pay, or that he was involved in drug trafficking and got what was coming to him (it later emerged that two of the accused murderers received suspended sentences last year in connection with an assault on a different African student). On March 19, one of the arrested skinheads blew these theories out of the water when he announced to the Leninsky District Court that they murdered the student because: “We were bored and decided to go to Mir Street, where there are many foreign [student] dorms, and kill a black.”

To the credit of the local authorities, at this point they decided to bring charges under Article 105 (Section 2, Paragraph L) which prohibits murder “motivated by national, racial or religious hatred or animosity.” This is only the third time that I am aware of that this particular statute has been used. If Voronezh prosecutors obtain a conviction in this case under Article 105, it could set an important precedent in how the Russian justice system deals with hate crimes.

### **THE 2003 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

Two extremist nationalist parties allied with the Kremlin did extremely well in Russia's parliamentary elections on December 7, 2003, bringing to power the most radically nationalistic State Duma in the country's post-Soviet history. The two pro-Western liberal political parties represented in the previous Duma—Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces (SPS)—were eliminated, removing from the Duma the only political forces consistently dedicated to the promotion of inter-ethnic tolerance and democracy. Their place was taken by Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), which almost doubled the number of its seats with 11% of the vote, and the Motherland bloc, which won 9%. To no one's surprise, the pro-Kremlin United Russia party got the lion share of the vote—37%. Both United Russia and the extremist nationalists benefited from overwhelmingly positive coverage on government-controlled television, which thanks to the Putin administration's elimination of the independent television media, is the only game in town. The role of opposition now falls exclusively to the newly-diminished Communists, who only won 13% of the vote. It should be noted that when the votes of all three blatantly antisemitic non-Kremlin parties (the Communists, the LDPR, Motherland) are added up, they come to 33% of the total party line vote, almost as many as the 37% who voted for United Russia (the rest voted for parties that did not cross the 5% barrier mandated for party representation in the State Duma). In other words, one out of three Russian voters supported explicitly antisemitic parties in the December 2003 elections.

Kremlin officials failed utterly to live up to their pledges that, in contrast to the 1999 elections, extremist parties and statements would not be permitted. Shortly after the 2003 elections, President Putin condemned nationalist politicians as “either indecent people, simply idiots, or provocateurs,” during a live TV and radio program. He went so far as to threaten to prosecute politicians using nationalist slogans. “Prosecutors must react to such things if they find the essence of a crime in certain actions. We have a corresponding article in the Criminal Code,” referring to Article 282, which prohibits public incitement of ethnic and religious hatred. At the same time, however, he claimed he had followed the election debates and did not notice any violations of the law. But, he warned, if such incidents of hate speech are confirmed, charges will be brought. (At the time of writing, no such prosecutions have been initiated).

The latest election results show that pro-tolerance and anti-racist government rhetoric, although helpful, has not had a major impact in reducing extremist nationalist sentiment among large chunks of the Russian electorate. Since all of the antisemitic and racist statements recounted below are part of the public record in Russia, it is a reasonable assumption that many voters either deliberately supported xenophobic platforms or, if they voted for other reasons, at least didn’t feel that the candidates’ antisemitism and racism in any way made them unfit for their support. This is a disturbing signal indeed for the future of inter-ethnic relations in Russia and for Russia’s relations with the West, and shows that xenophobic demagoguery remains a highly effective electoral strategy in Russia.

The Communists, the only remaining opposition force in the Duma, heavily relied on antisemitic propaganda this election cycle. In a September 2003 interview, Communist party leader Gennady Zyuganov warned that Russia is threatened by “Zionization,” which he blamed for the “the mass impoverishment and extinction” of millions of Russians since the collapse of the USSR. A November 2003 paid political ad quoted the number two man on the Communist party list, Senator Nikolai Kondratenko, accusing “Zionist capital” of “sucking all the living juice out of Russia and Russians” and of planning to “kill through hunger, cold, and moral torture no less than 70 million more people” in Russia. Both men won election to the Duma, where they will be joined by their comrade General Albert Makashov, who back in 1998 earned international notoriety for publicly calling for the mass murder of Russian Jews. After being stricken from the voting rolls right before the 1999 Duma elections, General Makashov won his old seat back in 2003, a clear sign that for many Russian voters, militant antisemitism is seen as a positive attribute in a candidate.

A month before the election, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (head of the LDPR, which doubled its seats in the December election) issued a statement in support of Malaysia’s then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, who earlier garnered international condemnation by claiming that “Jews rule the world.” “He told the truth!” Mr. Zhirinovskiy raved. “The biggest banks and world corporations are also ruled by Jews.” In the wake of the terrorist bombing on a suburban train in southern Russia in early December, Mr. Zhirinovskiy was quoted as saying that the Chechens were obviously guilty of the atrocity, and once their identities are established, all residents of their home villages should be exterminated.



Like the LDPR, Motherland has a large contingent of politicians known for their antisemitic and anti-American rhetoric, and one of its founding parties (People's Will) counts many of the country's most infamous neo-Nazis as members. Two producers of the antisemitic, Holocaust denying television show "Russian House" also won seats running with Motherland, as did Andrey Savelev, who baited Vladimir Zhirinovsky into a fistfight on national television by accusing him of being a secret Jew. Another new deputy—former Defense Minister Igor Rodionov—wrote an article shortly before the election calling for "Zionists" to "repent for their crimes against the Russian people." Another—Oleg Mashchenko—called Zionism "the main enemy of the peoples of Russia" in an interview with a hometown newspaper, while yet another Motherland deputy—Natalya Narochmitskaya—accused Israel of purposely inciting Palestinian terrorism for its own nefarious ends and strongly hinted that the Israelis were somehow behind the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US.

Favored by a combination of positive coverage on government-controlled television and the indisputable political talents of some of its leaders, the Motherland bloc's success was the surprise of the electoral season. Put together earlier in 2003, Motherland unites a disparate group of hard-right to moderate nationalists with left-wing populists under the leadership of Dmitry Rogozin—chairman of the previous Duma's International Affairs Committee and a close ally of the Kremlin—and Sergey Glazev—an economist and previously a rising star within the Communist Party. The mainstream view in the Russian media is that Motherland was created by Kremlin PR specialists in order to siphon off votes from the Communist Party.

The party's 57 page platform mixes populist economic prescriptions (reducing unemployment to 1%, jailing the oligarchs, etc.) with a paranoid world view and anti-migrant rhetoric. It begins with the alarming warning that:

Today all right-thinking citizens of Russia realize the threats posed by the dying out of the nation, its spiritual and material impoverishment, the degradation of the economy, the weakening of its defense capability, and the loss of the sovereignty, wholeness and independence of our Motherland, which has turned into "the world's backyard..." Real power in Russia has been usurped by a gang of greedy adventurers who call themselves oligarchs, and their corrupt facilitators. They exchange the sovereignty of the country for the condescending view of their foreign protectors towards the looting, corruption and extortion of the Russian "elite."

Russia, the party platform claims, is suffering from "the encroachment on our national sovereignty by open and hidden enemies of the Fatherland." Russia has two choices—either "ceaseless modernization" (a phrase that echoes the urgent rhetoric of Stalin's Five Year Plans), or "the continued political and economic colonization of the country... the breaking up of Russia into the 'spheres of influence' of various states and the populating of it with foreign migrants."

It is to this later threat that Motherland devotes an entire subsection of its party platform. Here, Motherland argues for the right to ethno-cultural purity in a frank declaration akin to the neo-Nazi slogan "Russia for Russians!": "We need to address the problem of migration not only from the position of the right of citizens to freely choose where to

live, but also from the position of the right of citizens to the preservation of a linguistic and cultural environment.”

The use of a phrase like “genetic potential” later in this section of the platform only reinforces the impression of a party obsessively focused on an exclusionary ethnic (*russky*) rather than a civic (*rossiysky*) definition of Russianess. The platform further proposes that any non-Russian migrant should be required to fluently speak Russian, quotas on the number of migrants to a particular town or city should be implemented, and anybody found to have facilitated the importation of illegal migrants should pay the costs of their deportation.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I would like to take a moment to describe to the Commission an innovative initiative that UCSJ is now attempting to mount. If the human rights community, acting alone—even with diplomatic support from abroad—cannot ultimately persuade the Kremlin of the benefits of human rights and civil society reform, how can we strengthen our case? We believe the answer lies in strengthening our coalition to include actors that the Kremlin actually listens to—the business community and the government’s economic policy officials. They worry about Russia’s general economic development and especially its relatively poor atmosphere for foreign trade and investment. The key to bringing them into our coalition is for human rights leadership to work with business leaders to analyze what we believe is a strong correlation between regions with poor human rights conditions and low rule of law and corresponding low levels of foreign investment. If we can succeed in getting the human rights and business and economic planning communities to jointly analyze these issues, we have a good chance of enlisting them in our advocacy for reform.

It is our hope that the European Commission supported project to combat racism and antisemitism, combined with other Russian and international NGOs’ work, will have a notable impact on the problems I’ve described above. Efforts to promote tolerance, inform the public about hate crimes, pressure local authorities to take hate crimes seriously, and coordinate anti-extremism efforts with friendly local and federal law enforcement officials and agencies are crucially important for Russia’s future as a stable, prosperous, multi-ethnic and religiously diverse country. As with all human rights issues, our main weapon in this fight is publicity, and as I hope I have shown in my testimony today, the Russian and the international media have an important role to play. Even more important are expressions of concern on the part of the US government, including public hearings such as this on human rights issues in Russia. Thank you again for your attention to these issues and for your continuing hard work on behalf of human rights in the former Soviet Union.

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<sup>2</sup> “Programma deystviy izbiratel’nogo bloka ‘Rodina’ (narodno-patriotichesky soyuz). “Sotsial’naya spravedlivost’ i ekonomichesky rost.” <http://www.rodina-nps.ru/programma/show/?id=3>.